

WYCOMBE

SHOCKER!

EVER had one of those days when nothing goes right? Wycombe Wanderers know just how you feel after slumping to their second home defeat of the season in the Rothmans Isthmian League on Saturday.

And Wanderers can offer precious few excuses, for on the day, they were the second best side to Dulwich Hamlet whom they had beaten at Champion Hill a month ago. The simple truth of the matter is that Dulwich were the more positive, aggressive and better equipped team and they thoroughly deserved the three points at stake.

They deserved the points until the last quarter of the match, that is. It was at this stage that, for some unknown reason, Dulwich decided to resort to physical tactics which brewed up to a climax when Terry Reardon, waiting for a free kick to be taken, was felled in the penalty box. Referee Barker, who had failed to take a tight

Wycombe Wanderers 0, Dulwich Hamlet 1 REPORT BY STUART EARP

rein in the early stages, was unable to act as he was unsighted when the incident took place. So was his linesman. He told me afterwards that no referee could take action in such circumstances and that he had been told of three different players who had allegedly committed the offence.

I also missed the incident but can only point out the fact that Reardon and Trevor Bladon were having a running feud in the last 15 minutes.

In the referee's defence, conditions were not easy on Saturday with a bone hard ground making the ball rise awkwardly. There were many high tackles, some punished others unpunished. Several people were wondering whether the match should have been played at all in the frosty conditions but to my mind, there was never any doubt that football was possible — albeit difficult.

The violence that flared up in the last quarter was totally un-

necessary from Dulwich's point of view. They were clearly the better side and could have finished the game firmly in the driving seat without resorting to rough house tactics. Several players were guilty, amongst them Peter Mills, their diminutive midfield player. It was a shame to see a player of such skill reverting to niggling fouls.

All this doesn't get away from the fact that Wycombe were at an extremely low ebb on Saturday. They were outgunned in every department and at times looked disinterested in the game. Only one player, Dave Bullock, matched the Dulwich enthusiasm.

The hard ground called for bravery and steel nerves as the ball bounced high but when the time came, Wycombe were second best. They were repeatedly beaten for the ball and it is a long time since a visiting goalkeeper has had so little to do at Loakes Park.

Not once was Alan Thomas stretched throughout the 90 minutes, which shows you how ineffective Wanderers were in

front of goal. The forwards must not shoulder all the blame, however. The Blues were out-matched in midfield while the defence, normally so cool and rock-sure, was harassed into many errors. The passing throughout the whole team was poor and you could not pick out a single Wycombe player who played up to his full capability.

Wanderers, still without injured full back Paul Birdseye, started well with Reardon using the ball well from midfield but they failed to make much impression up front and it was Dulwich who got in the first strike at goal, John Maskell saving Hugh Wilson's bouncing shot.

With Bladon dominating midfield, Dulwich took control after the first 10 minutes and only the covering of John Delaney saved Wycombe in the 21st minute. Maskell fumbled Bladon's corner and Rod Brooks headed towards the net. Delaney was on the line to nod the ball away.

Dylan Evans went close after 34 minutes but Dulwich, fighting and chasing for everything, had succeeded in throwing casual Wycombe out of their stride. All they needed now was a flash of brilliance to produce a goal. Bladon supplied it in the 41st minute. He tried a shot from outside the box which was blocked. Quickly recovering possession, Bladon rounded a defender and then cracked a looping drive into the net from 15 yards. Maskell was helpless.

There's not much doubt Dulwich deserved to be ahead at the interval but the crowd must have hoped for a revitalised Wycombe side in the second half. Their hopes were soon dwindling when Dulwich began the new half in the same style. Wanderers were unable to match the work rate and were continually second best.

Reardon nearly caught Thomas off his line with a clever lob but the best chance for Wycombe came in the 58th minute when Evans sprinted to the bye line. Three Wycombe players were in the box waiting for the cross, but Thomas tipped the ball over the top for a corner.

An all-too-rare burst of speed from Mick Holifield promised an equaliser but, in keeping with Wycombe's fortunes, his shot was sliced high and wide. Somehow, that incident summed up Wanderers' frustrations.

In the last 15 minutes, Dulwich seemed to sense a Wycombe revival and resorted to fouls in a bid to stop them. The Reardon incident came a couple of minutes from the end and cast a black shadow on the game which ended with Wanderers netting right on full time. Referee Barker disallowed the effort for a foul on the goalkeeper.

By going down in this displeasing game, Wanderers missed the chance to jump back into second place in Division One. If they are to keep up with the leaders, they will have to play a good deal better than this.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; D. Bullock, K. Mead, J. Delaney, R. Eaton, H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Holifield; D. Evans, A. Horseman, G. Anthony (sub D. Alexander 63 mins.).

DULWICH: A. Thomas; C. Lewington, R. Brooks, E. Allinson, S. Rogers; B. West, T. Bladon, P. Mills; H. Wilson, J. Dear, A. Jackson. Sub C. Pooley (not used).

Referee: J. Barker (Brentwood).

Halftime: 0-1. **Goalscorer:** Dulwich — Bladon (41).

Official paying attendance: 950.
Approx. total attendance: 1,100.

